

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. – 11. (canceled)

12. (new) An automatic analyzer comprising:

a sample dispensing mechanism for dispensing a sample from a sample container;

a sample container disk, arranged to accommodate a plurality of sample containers arranged circularly on said sample container disk, and to transfer the sample containers to a sample dispensing position of said sample dispensing mechanism;

an information reader arranged to read, when said sample container is positioned at an information reading position, an information recorded on an information recording medium attached to said sample container positioned at said information reading position; and

a sample hand-contact preventing plate arranged to cover a part of said sample container disk so as to cover a sample container positioned at said sample dispensing position, and so as to cover a sample container positioned at said information reading position.

13. (new) An automatic analyzer according to claim 12, wherein said sample hand-contact preventing plate comprises a portion covering at least one part of a moving locus of a top end of a probe of said sample dispensing mechanism.

14. (new) An automatic analyzer according to claim 12, wherein said sample hand-contact preventing plate comprises a mechanism for causing said sample hand-contact preventing plate to retreat from a position covering said sample container disk.

15. (new) An automatic analyzer according to claim 14, further comprising a detector for detecting a retreat of said sample hand-contact preventing plate from said position covering said sample container disk, and a controller for stopping a dispensing operation of said sample dispensing mechanism when said detector detects said retreat of said sample hand-contact preventing plate from said position covering said sample container disk.

16. (new) An automatic analyzer according to claim 12, wherein said sample hand-contact preventing plate comprises an electrically conductive material, and said sample hand-contact preventing plate is electrically grounded.

17. (new) An automatic analyzer according to claim 13, wherein said sample hand-contact preventing plate comprises an electrically conductive material, and said sample hand-contact preventing plate is electrically grounded.

18. (new) An automatic analyzer according to claim 14, wherein said sample hand-contact preventing plate comprises an electrically conductive material, and said sample hand-contact preventing plate is electrically grounded.

19. (new) An automatic analyzer according to claim 15, wherein said sample hand-contact preventing plate comprises an electrically conductive material, and said sample hand-contact preventing plate is electrically grounded.